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UNCLAS MUSCAT 001606

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI AND G/TIP
STATE PASS TO USTR (AROSENBURG)
LABOR FOR JSHEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INDIAN OVERSTAYERS OFFERED EASY OUT

REF: MUSCAT 1327

Summary

1. The Indian Embassy has announced that it has struck a deal with the Omani Ministry of Manpower to facilitate the exit of all Indian nationals currently in Oman on expired employment visas. The move comes as a welcome reprieve to thousands of unemployed Indians incapable of paying overstay fines. End summary.

Unemployed Indians To Exit En Masse

2. On October 17, the Indian embassy announced in the local press that the Ministry of Manpower has agreed to allow the exit of thousands of Indians on expired residence/labor visas. Since then, the Indian embassy has been swamped with nationals registering to exit, and estimates that at least 10,000 Indians will leave Oman under the program. Indians wishing to depart are required to register with the Indian Embassy by providing copies of passports and airline tickets home. The Indian Embassy has also asked airlines to offer reduced fares for the returnees.

3. According to an Indian embassy source, a large number of Indians were rendered jobless after they were barred from running small grocery stores or being employed as drivers under the government's drive to "Omanize" certain labor sectors. Many Indian nationals are beginning to realize that Omanis are rapidly assuming jobs they once held, and see this new offer as a welcome opportunity to return home.

Comment: A Welcome Step

4. As reported in reftel, Omani fines for overstayers, designed to encourage observance of immigration laws, has the unintended effect of making it prohibitively expensive for them to depart. By periodically offering fine waivers, the Omani government is able to reduce the out-of-status population, removing an illegal labor pool at greater risk of exploitation by unfair labor practices -- a plus for all parties involved.
BALTIMORE